



Initial conversation with

Support Group Facilitators – Peer Support Plus®

At least one of those present will be a trained and experienced Peer Support Group Work Facilitator.

If the Initial conversation is face to face and about joining a mixed-gender Support Group then two Support Group members will be present – one female and one male. The second may not be a Facilitator.

Welcome and Introductions

Establish who is present.

Facilitators and prospective Group Member to introduce themselves by Preferred Name and briefly describe their lived experience of self-managing their mental health, and of participating in Peer Support Group(s).

Introduce the venue

Fire exits, assembly points, toilets, smoking (plus waiting area and refreshments if meeting at a venue where the Support Group usually meets).

Reaffirm that this conversation is not an interview

This *Initial conversation with Support Group Facilitators*¹ is not an interview. It is designed to help the prospective member decide if joining a Support Group would be the right move for them at this time.

An Initial conversation usually takes between 30 and 45 minutes.

Our *Introduction to Group Work*¹ Workshop (IGW) explains that Support Group sessions are structured differently to Workshops and Courses, and how it might feel when taking part in a Support Group.

Facilitators have found this Initial conversation helps prospective Support Group members feel more comfortable when joining their first session.

How Peer Support Plus helps me learn to self-manage my mental health

- I accept responsibility for my own behaviour.
- I am expert in my own distress.
- I can learn from my own and others lived experiences.
- I can take control over, and responsibility for, my own wellbeing.
- Only I can do it – but I don't have to do it alone.

Confidentiality

What is said in the room stays in the room – except when we need to follow our *Safeguarding Policy*¹ which describes our duty to disclose any concerns surrounding child safety or adults at risk.

This means that if we have concerns for your safety, or the safety of others may be at risk, we reserve the right to pass these concerns and any related data to other third parties – for example, a mental health crisis team or, if necessary, the police.

Group Safety – Introduce *Guidelines for Behaviour*¹ which is explained more fully at our *Introduction to Group Work (IGW)*¹ workshop. In addition, any Group member may propose additional guidelines which must be agreed and reviewed from time to time by the Group (with regard to, for examples: mobile telephone silence, room lighting, disabilities, eating and drinking during sessions, etc).

Typical session structure

- Welcome (and housekeeping, notices, Group administration).
- Round of Good News (giving Preferred Names if member unfamiliar).
- ‘Who would like to Take Time’ today?
- 2x Taking Time or Checking-In (each with a Round of Sharing if wanted).
- Comfort/refreshment break.
- ‘Would anyone else like to Take Time today’?
- 2x Taking Time or Checking-In (each with a Round of Sharing if wanted).
- Summary of any housekeeping actions arising, for examples: confirm next meeting date, time and venue; the Group may agree to guarantee an opportunity for a Peer to Take Time or Check-in at the next meeting; Facilitator may promise to distribute a technique handout referred to; Facilitator may promise to seek news of an absent Peer; etc.
- Round of ‘Something I am taking away’ from this session.

Rounds

How they work and why we use them i.e. to guarantee everyone a chance to speak and be heard (or pass). When sharing it is vital that Peers:

- feel safe
- maintain trust
- feel able to risk disclosing difficult feelings
- maintain personal boundaries and don’t share more than you are comfortable to talk about
- are kind to ourselves and others
- make no judgements
- do not interrupt (except when a timely question is essential to ensure clarity)
- do not have side conversations

Taking Time

The part of the session where a Peer can choose to voice something to the group. It is important that Peers can trust each other and risk voicing difficult feelings and experiences, always remembering to maintain safe personal boundaries.

It might be: something that has been on their mind recently; something that has been suppressed for a long time; something they would like to hear different perspectives on; perhaps an update about something previously shared; or something they might want to celebrate; etc.

If sharing is wanted by the Peer who has Taken Time, a Facilitator will reflect what has been shared then negotiate and agree with the Peer a question around the feelings they expressed. The Facilitator then invites everyone to share, in a Round, their lived experience when similar feelings were evoked – describing what helped them, and what did not.

When the Round is complete, the Facilitator will offer the Peer who has Taken Time an opportunity to reflect verbally on the sharing. The Peer may choose to say something, or pass if they wish to.

Risk of triggering difficult feelings

It is not possible to predict what feelings and experiences a Peer will share. Some of these will trigger difficult feelings in others. It is often possible to sit with a difficult feeling. It can help to know that it is Okay to leave and Okay to come back.

Silence isn't bad

When the Facilitator offers opportunities to Take Time, or when a Peer is Taking Time, or someone is sharing in a Round, it isn't unusual for there to be silence in the room which can sometimes last a few minutes. For some people, silence can feel uncomfortable and a little odd, evoking an urge to 'fill the gap', but silence is positive and gives space for Peers to gather their thoughts or just sit with difficult feelings.

Facilitators' Role

Facilitators are primarily responsible for process – guiding Peers through each Group session and maintaining a safe environment where difficult feelings may be shared.

Facilitators are also Peers who are actively learning to self-manage and maintain their own mental health. Peers should treat Facilitators and other Peers, as equals.

All Peers share in facilitation to the extent that everyone is responsible for ensuring their own behaviours aspire to *Guidelines for Behaviour*¹; and for voicing, at an appropriate time in the Group session, their thoughts and feelings about improving the conduct and safety of the Group.

Timekeeping is an important element in Facilitation. It ensures there is an equal opportunity in every Round for each Peer to share. If the group is large there will be less time for each Peer to share, so those who choose to share may need to be concise.

Keeping in touch with the Support Group

*Peer Engagement Policy*¹

Open ended membership of the Support Group

*Peer Relationship*¹

How our Support Groups are funded

Support Groups are £FREE to Peers. See also the Objects of Peer Support Plus – in our *Constitution*¹. Voluntary donations and responsible fundraising activities are always welcome. Please see the Donate page of our website¹ for more information.

Why we don't encourage social contact outside the Support Group

Peer Support Groups work because Peers are able to share difficult feelings and lived experiences with people who are not part of their life or social circle.

Peers' lived experiences evidence how vital confidentiality is to Peer Support.

Confidences can be broken accidentally or even thoughtlessly when Peers socialise, or engage in other contexts such as work or personal relationships. Once something is said it cannot be unsaid. Breaches of confidentiality can hurt all involved. They damage trust in the Support Group, the very trust that enables Peers to disclose difficult feelings and benefit from hearing other Peers share their lived experiences.

- It can be hard to openly share feelings in the Support Group when other Peers are directly involved in the problem, or know the people you want to talk about.
- It can feel awkward socialising with Peers, partners and friends when, after sharing confidences in the Support Group, you and the Peers present have learned something about the thoughts and behaviours of those present that wouldn't otherwise be known.
- It can be hard to remember if you learned something because it was disclosed in confidence during the Support Group or learned through general social contact, making it harder to protect confidences.

We always name-check before a prospective member joins a Support Group in case an existing Group member has, or has had, a personal, social or business relationship with them at some time.

When we meet another Group member unexpectedly in public, we do not usually greet one another openly because others present may not be aware that we are both learning to self-manage our mental health.

Having said that, Group members have attended each other's performances, fundraisers, funerals, etc. and sometimes enjoy a celebratory or seasonal gathering together. Some may work together in other Peer Support or Wellbeing settings.

Prospective Group member's past experience and present readiness

To gain some insight into the progress of the prospective Group member's 'personal journey' we must allow them plenty of time to speak. Ask open, supportive questions such as:

- What is your past experience of Group Work?
- Have you attended our Workshop *Introduction to Group Work*¹ (IGW) [or very similar elsewhere]?
- How do you think joining a Peer Support Group will help you learn to better self-manage your mental health?

- Are you available to attend most sessions of the Support Group? *Demand for seats outstrips supply so there is a waiting list. It is only fair to offer seats to those who will benefit by using them.*
- What basic digital skills and technology do you have that might help us engage with one another? If you choose to, we can signpost you towards help with overcoming digital exclusion. *A telephone number is essential. A regularly accessed personal email address and the means to view our website www.peersupportplus.org would be really useful. The capability to meet by Zoom from a confidential space would be advantageous.*
- Do you want to join a 'face-to face' or 'mostly by Zoom' Support Group?
- Would you still like to join a Support Group, and if so when? (Or say what we suggest you might wish to explore before joining a Support Group.)
- Have you seen our Peer Support Plus *Programme*¹ and know how to apply for our Workshops, Courses and other Support Groups?
- Signposting – Do you know how to find help and support available elsewhere?
- Have you already read *Peer Engagement Policy*¹, signed *Peer Relationship*¹ and *Privacy Notice*¹, and completed our *Diversity Survey*¹ and your initial *Self Evaluation*¹? If not, we need you to do so before attending any of our Support Groups, Workshops (other than IGW) or Courses.

If the prospective Support Group Member wishes to join the Group but has yet to form a Peer Relationship with Peer Support Plus, they may welcome an offer of practical help to work through these necessary documents.

Next steps?

Thank you for talking with us today (We look forward to seeing you again?)

Note¹ available on our website peersupportplus.org

Initial conversation **Structure** for issue to prospective Support Group member, follows...



Initial conversation with Support Group Facilitators – Peer Support Plus®

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Structure

- Welcome and Introductions
- Introduce the venue
- Reaffirm that this conversation is not an interview
- How Peer Support Plus helps me learn to self-manage my mental health
- Confidentiality
- Group Safety
- Session structure
- Rounds
- Taking Time
- Risk of triggering difficult feelings
- Silence isn't bad
- Facilitators' Role
- Keeping in touch with the Support Group
- Open ended membership of the Support Group
- How our Support Groups are funded
- Why we don't encourage social contact outside the Support Group
- Prospective Group member's past experience and present readiness.
- Next steps

End